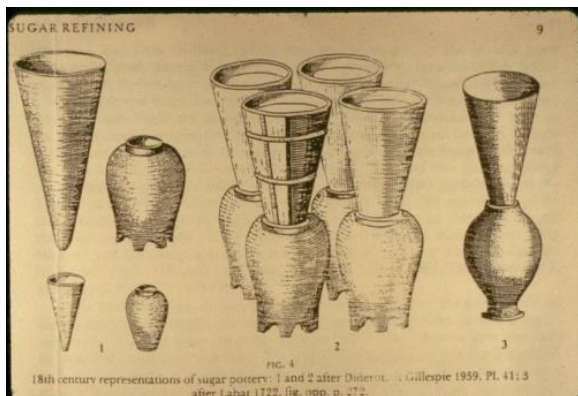




# FROM THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA ARCHAEOLOGY COLLECTIONS

## SUGAR REFINING IN 19<sup>TH</sup>-C. ALEXANDRIA & THE ROLE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LABOR



From left: sugar molds inside syrup jars; sugar refinery "claying" room (Denis Diderot, *Encyclopédie*, 18<sup>th</sup> c.)

### Artifact Group #1 Syrup Jar and Sugar Mold Sherds

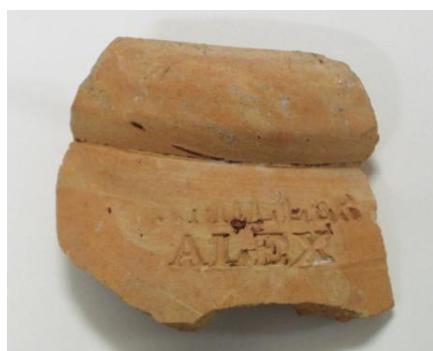
Earthenware

Early 19<sup>th</sup> century

Excavated: Moore-McLean Sugar  
House, 111 N. Alfred Street; 900  
King Street

The Moore-McLean Sugar House was one of two sugar refineries operating in Alexandria in the early 1800s. Alexandria ranked third nationally for volume of sugar produced.

Seven slaves—five men and two boys—using "one pan, one cooler, and one cistern and about five thousand molds, and the same quantity of pots" labored at the Sugar House. Sugar production—from field to factory—was accomplished with enslaved labor. In Alexandria, African Americans toiled to refine sugar in oppressive and dangerous working conditions.



"J. MILLER / ALEX" stamp on syrup jar  
(matches mark on box's bottom sherd)



Imported raw sugar and water boiled in huge vats. The syrup was poured into cone-shaped molds placed on large jars (pictured at top). Wet clay topped the sugar. Water in the clay percolated through the sugar, washing the syrup and leaving a cap of dried clay on top. The syrup filtered down through the sugar as it hardened and trickled out into the jars (pictured above). After several days the sugar was removed from the molds and left to dry. Cakes of the refined white sugar were wrapped in paper and sold. The end product was expensive and used mainly for special occasions. Other sweeteners, such as honey, molasses, and brown sugar, were more common.

Excavations at the Sugar House were the first at any sugar refinery in the U.S. City archaeologists found over 10,000 sugar mold fragments. Then, archaeologists discovered hundreds of syrup jar fragments in a brick-lined cellar a half-block away from the Sugar House, at 900 King Street.